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BOOKS

Prairie power

The emergence of New West a vital economic story

PRAIRIE CAPITALISM:
POWER AND INFLUENCE
IN THE NEW WEST
By John Richards and Larry Pratt
McClelland & Steward
240 pages $16.95

By IAN ANDERSON
of The Gazette

In a way, Vernon "Dry Hole" Hunter is an important a figure in Canadian history as Henri Bourassa. While Bourassa rekindled nationalist spirit in Quebec in the early part of this century, Hunter, a toolpush for Imperial Oil Ltd., was midwife at the birth of Canada's other great regional awakening, in the West.

Dry Hole and his drilling crew, on Feb. 13, 1947, struck oil at the Leduc #1 well in a sleepy farm town a few miles south of Edmonton. That started the Alberta oil boom, and the tilt westward of economic power in Canada. Leduc, the town, is now a part of the urban sprawl that calls itself modern Edmonton.

The emergence of the New West is the most important economic story of this decade in Canada. In terms of the new economic nationalism that the West is showing, it is the most dramatic, too. The events well deserve to be chronicled. After reading this book one can say they atlf deserve to be chronicled.

A reader may justifiably feel somewhat disoriented when, after 328 pages of *Prairie Capitalism* — a most promising title — he stumbles upon the authors' conclusion: "The primary source of the entrepreneurial initiative and of the changes which have overtaken prairie capitalism since the opening of the new postwar mineral staples has been public, not private. In the final analysis it has been the ideas of politicians and the actions of governments that mattered most."

What has happened is that a book purporting to analyse economic power and influence in Alberta and Saskatchewan in fact turns out to be a history of resource policy in those two provinces. Power and influence seldom enters what is essentially an academic narrative. Individuals are subordinated to accounts of government policy.

For the general reader this is a pity. The dynamism of the New West, as the authors dub the region, is as important to our 21st Century as the growth of Montreal was to our 19th Century. If ever economic nationalism is to emerge as an important force in Canada — and that translates as repatriation of natural resources — the way will be led by the West, where a nationalistic capitalism is already emerging in the oil industry.

The fact that *Prairie Capitalism* does not even mention Albertans such as Jack Gallagher, chairman of Dome Petroleum, and refers just once to Robert Blair, czar of Alberta Gas Trunk Line, is indicative of the book's weakness. These are the men building the "economic empire in Canada's New West" that the book loftily claims to study. Yet these men have no place in it.

Rightly, the authors trace the economic roots of the modern West to the populist parties of the region's 1930s — the CCF and Social Credit. Rightly, they recognize that this populism embraces not just a class of people, but an entire region, and was born out of mistrust of Eastern capitalists. And rightly they trace the link between such populist Alberta premiers as Aberhart and Manning, and economic nationalists such as Peter Lougheed.

But something important is missing from this analysis. Where once populist governments spoon-fed local industry, those companies are acquiring a momentum of their own. Where once Alberta required the resources of the multi-national oil companies to extract its oil, domestic Canadian companies are large enough now to challenge the multinationals for this right.

One has only to think of Blair's winning the right last year to build the $10 billion Alaska natural gas pipeline. Or of Gallagher's incredible gamble on extracting oil from the Beaufort Sea. That is the New West. What Richard and Pratt write about is really the first hesitant steps of the area. Significantly, the authors seem more at home relating the growth of public ownership in Saskatchewan than capitalism in Alberta.

Prairie Capitalism is a look backward at the roots of the New West, and ultimately rewards the reader for slogging through difficult material. The book does not, as it advertises, analyse the new power and new influence in the New West. For that we'll have to wait. Eagerly.

Ian Anderson is a political reporter for The Gazette in Ottawa and a former business writer in Montreal.

West of the '50s: Oil technology and old-style farming

CANADA'S CHILD SLAVES

Young British immigrants were frequently abused and cheated

THE HOME CHILDREN
By Phyllis Harrison, ed.
Watson & Dwyer
271 pages
$14.95 (cloth) $8.50 (paper)

By ZONIA KEYWAN
Special to The Gazette

We tend to think of turn-of-the century immigrants as tough, hardy people, well-equipped to endure severe hardship. New Canadians realize that

of the immigrants who entered this country between 1870 and 1930, 100,000 were unaccompanied children, some as young as six years old.

These youthful British immigrants, popularly known as the "Home children," were residents of institutions operated by charitable organizations and churches. Most were orphans; some came from families who were too poor to support them.

The British child emigration movement was conceived with good intentions. Underprivileged urban children, whose prospects at home were bleak, were to travel to Canada, serve as indentured workers on farms, then strike out on their own in a country that offered more opportunities than Britain. Unfortunately, reality did not always correspond to these expectations. While it's true that in the long run most Home children benefitted from emigration, their first years in Canada were anything but happy.

Although a few lucky children were taken into good homes, many were subjected to unkind, even brutal treatment. As one Home boy whose story appears in this book remarks, "We were the cheapest slave labor the farmers ever had."

Employers often paid their indentured workers far less than they had promised; some gave them nothing at all. It was not uncommon for boys to be severely beaten and girls molested, even raped. Most employers ignored the official agreement that the children were to be sent to school. As a result, Home children suffered the lifelong disadvantages of very limited education.

The psychological strain was equally hard to bear. Children were regularly separated from their siblings, the only family they had ever known. They were also victims of a great deal of prejudice. So strong was the stigma of being a Home child, that even as adults many were ashamed to speak of their past. Some even changed their names to conceal their origins.

The British child emigration movement is a significant chapter in Canada's history. Unfortunately, Phyllis Harrison has been unable to turn this potentially-fascinating subject into an interesting book. Except for a short introduction by the editor, the book consists of personal accounts written by the immigrants themselves or by their children. These first-hand stories — more than 100 in all, some accompanied by photographs — are tiresomely similar, hardly distinguishable one from another. Only very occasionally does a particularly memorable anecdote liven up the text.

People who were themselves child immigrants will undoubtedly find *The Home Children* interesting, for it will stir up a flood of memories. Most readers, however, will find it simply monotonous.

Zonia Keywan is author of 'Greater than Kings: Ukrainian Pioneer Settlement in Canada.'

SPIRIT OF THE NORTH

C.W. Nicol's tale of cultural barriers is an ode to the beauty of the Arctic

THE WHITE SHAMAN
By C.W. Nicol
McClelland & Stewart
260 pages $10.95

By SHERRY SIMON
Special to The Gazette

There are novels whose themes can be all too neatly reduced to formulas, but whose reality as a reading experience does not at all correspond to the potential stereotypes of its subject. While *The White Shaman* tells of the social and spiritual encounter of the West with the timeless North, it embeds its argument in a lively adventure story celebrating the vigor and multiplicity of life in the Far North.

C.W. Nicol's wide and intimate knowledge of the North adds the dimension of a captivating travelogue to this metaphysical adventure story. Nicol's fascination with Zen is also evident in the novel the lived in Japan for many years and is the author of *Moving Zen: Karate as a Way to Gentleness*). Nicol has also written *From the Roof of Africa* (1972), the account of his experience as a game warden in Ethiopia, and 11 children's books in both English and Japanese.

The white shaman of the title is Richard Tavett, a 19-year-old Canadian who travels North as research assistant to an arrogant and demanding biologist—a man Richard has always worshipped. Richard's growing independence as well as his natural affinities for the land and culture of the Inuit enter into increasing conflict with the macho Philip. Their confrontation leads to a winter of solitude for Richard—a winter lived as a gradual metamorphosis. The powers which Ipeelee the Inuit elder had discerned in Richard come to the surface and Richard becomes Tuktsit, the spirit at one with the world of all living things.

No resume of the plot can indicate the multiple dimensions of the story—the social and political commentary, the profusion of detail on the hunting practices of the Inuit of the Eastern Arctic, the sensitivity and vividness with which the wildlife of the North is rendered. The presence of the gulls, ravens, guillemots, killer whales, beluga, seals, foxes, bears and caribou assume an intensity commensurate with the rarity of life in a frozen world. The Inuit community is depicted as warm, intensely affectionate, but divided among itself. The younger generation is just beginning to be painfully aware of its ignorance of the old ways, while Ipeelee is desperately trying to convey what he knows before it is too late. But it is not anyone who can receive the special knowledge. Ipelee chooses Richard, a White man, as the proper recipient.

Early in the novel Richard wonders if his love for the North is not really the satisfaction of an adventurer who has conquered the rigors of a harsh land. But it is Philip of course who is the Romantic, the adventurer who tries to break the otherness of the land as he tries to break the otherness of his fears. Richard, in contrast, comes home to the North. Unfortunately, he chooses the wrong time.

If there is a moral to this metaphysical tale, it is that the White man must come to terms with the South before he can live in the North. But it is not the moral of the novel which lingers after a reading of *The White Shaman*, it is the exquisite beauty of the communion between the hunter and the wounded seal, and the haunting silence of the kayak as it glides through Arctic waters.

Sherry Simon is a Montreal freelance writer.

MORE SCIENCE THAN FICTION

Isaac Asimov surveys life on our planet and in the galaxies beyond our grasp

EXTRATERRESTRIAL CIVILIZATIONS
By Isaac Asimov
General Publishing
282 pages $13.50

By JAMES MENNIE
Special to The Gazette

Fashions change, but dogma changes faster.

If 25 years ago someone had stated the belief that life on other planets was even a remote possibility, the powers that be would have branded the heretic a "dreamer" at best and a "crackpot" at worst.

However, yesterday's yahoos are today's prophets, as the success of such films as *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* readily demonstrates. Today you would not dare assert that such life does not exist.

But while Hollywood has been realizing a hefty profit from the public's fascination with the great beyond, the scientists and astronomers whose discoveries laid the groundwork for such flights of fancy have remained relatively quiet. Any literature produced on the subject is generally more concerned with protecting reputations than shedding new light, and what's worse, they are written by scientists for

ISAAC ASIMOV
De-mystifies science

scientists. We laymen apparently are fit only to underwrite their studies.

Fortunately, however, there exists in the fields of science in general and astronomy in particular an individual whose powers of erudition are matched only by his ability to explain the most complex concepts in the simplest terms. He has produced scores of works that de-mystify even the most daunting topics, and his reputation as a scholar is only enhanced by his renown as one of the most prolific writers of this century. He is, in a way, a legend — and his name is Isaac Asimov.

But, while Dr. Asimov's fame is based upon his prowess as a science fiction writer, *Extraterrestrial Civilizations* is no scatterbrained collection of half-baked conjectures upon little green men who sip about on neon frisbees. It is in fact a thoughtfully conceived and easily understood examination of not only the possible nature of life in other worlds but of the makeup of life on our own planet as well.

With an easygoing and readable style that has established him as one of science's best interpretors, Asimov takes the reader on a systematic survey of the life forms and conditions on earth, the moon, Mars, Venus, the "green giants" on the edge of the solar system; and from there to the stars and other galaxies.

We learn the classifications of life forms, the necessary conditions of their origins and the probable directions of the evolutionary cycle in other worlds. But most of all, we learn that for all our vaunted knowledge and fine-sounding scientific terms, so far we can only look up at the stars in wonder.

However, thanks to Dr. Asimov, while we may not know the answer to modern science's greatest puzzle, we at least have a better understanding of the question.

James Mennie is a Montreal freelance writer.

POISON PENMANSHIP

A former publisher takes a look at hate mail through the ages

DEAR SIR, DROP DEAD
Ed. by Donald Carroll
Collier-Macmillan Canada
151 pages $6.95 (paper)

By AL STRACHAN
of The Gazette

It is a fact that has been long lamented by those in the public eye that you don't have to pass a sanity test or demonstrate possession of an IQ above plant life to mail a letter. Hate mail, crank and nut letters are part of the job, an occupational hazard. The letters come from semi-literates and Oxford scholars alike, and they are all sent with a single-minded purpose: To deflate the ego of the recipient.

In some cases the ploy doesn't work. Howard Cosell, a man who probably has received more hate mail than any other living being, has if anything developed an even more inflated opinion of himself.

Interestingly, Cosell is one of the many celebrities who refused to comply with author Donald Carroll's request that they share their mail with the public. Cosell said that publication of the unpleasant correspondence would be bad for his image.

Others who declined to pass along or admit to hate mail are Johnny Carson, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Don Meredith and Barbara Walters.

However, even without their contributions, we have plenty — more than enough in some cases, notably that of professional atheist and television personality Madalyn Murray O'Hair.

Many of her letters are only barely literate. Most are bluntly abusive: "All you are is nothing but a big old witch with a big ugly fat face and mouth on you." Most invoke the wrath of God, including one addressed to God c/o Ms. O'Hair asking her to destroy 31 cities in Texas.

But here, more noticeably than elsewhere in the book, letters are included which are pathetic. They make their senders objects of derision. Carroll draws a fine line between sanity and mental derangement in his choice of which letters to print and which to exclude.

Letters to authors, editors and literary agents make up by far the best segment of the collection. Occasionally the reply to hate mail is funnier than the original.

Of particular note is a form rejection letter sent out by Dr. Hunter S. Thompson "Minister of Manuscripts" for *Rolling Stone*. "Don't ever send this kind of brain-damaged swill around here again! ... Why don't you get a job, wino? ... I could kill those bedwetting geeks (at *R.S.*) for sending me this tedious and embarassing tissue of delusions. ... and I wouldn't mind killing you, too. ..."

Here's one for colleague Juan Rodriguez:

American rock critic Richard Meltzer, upon receiving a particularly unpleasant missive, sent its author a box of chocolates preinfested with cockroaches. He received an indignant — and very gross — reply.

And finally, politicians give as good as they get. Jody Powell, when press secretary to Jimmy Carter during Carter's term as governor of Georgia, replied to a lady who wrote that Carter was a "gutless peanut brain" for refusing to protest busing:

"Among the many burdens that fall upon a governor, one of the most expensive is having to read barely legible letters from morons like you.

"I am very happy that I can at least spare the governor from having to respond. I respectfully suggest that you take two running jumps and go straight to hell."

Al Strachan is Gazette sports editor.

OF ZOOS AND ZOOKEEPERS

Biologist shares new and witty visions; wildlife refuge explored

THE MEDUSA AND THE SNAIL
By Lewis Thomas
Penguin Books Canada Ltd.
175 pages $10.95

Lewis Thomas has a delightful habit of turning over rocks and old boards to see what is underneath. He shares his findings with us in 29 essays on topics ranging from zoos and committees to warts and punctuation.

Witty, at times almost zany, Thomas purposely exposes the reverse side and finds merit.

On Evolution: ... we are here by the purest chance and by mistake at that.

On Human Error: "The capacity to leap across mountains of information to land lightly on the wrong side represents the highest of human endowments."

On Worrying: "Worrying is the most natural and spontaneous of all human functions. It is time to acknowledge this, perhaps even to learn to do it better."

For a refreshing look at ourselves and the world around us, don't miss *The Medusa and the Snail*.

CREATURE COMFORTS
By Joan Ward-Harris
Collins Publishers
204 pages $12.95 illustrated

Ravenshill, the author's home a mere 11 km. outside Victoria, B.C., has been turned into a refuge for injured and orphaned wildlife. Here animals are nursed back to health and restored to the wilds where they belong.

Joan Ward-Harris recounts to us her tragic and triumphant experiences in dealing with animals on their terms — these are not pets.

A painter of water colors, she is equally adept at painting pictures with words, as this, her first book, testifies.

All age groups will find *Creature Comforts* an enjoyable experience.

Peter Oddam

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